

V

The NSC System

A. INTRODUCTION

This section summarizes briefly the structure of the NSC system and the Department's role in it, discusses the response to NSC study and decision memoranda, and describes the functioning of the Under Secretaries Committee.

B. THE NSC STRUCTURE

The NSC system is three-tiered with the Council itself at the top, the NSC Review and Operational Groups in the middle, and the Interdepartmental Groups at the base.

1. The National Security Council

The Council itself is made up of the President as Chairman, the Vice President and the Secretaries of State and Defense. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is the military advisor and the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) is the intelligence advisor to the Council. These two officials or their representatives attend all meetings of the Council and its subgroups. Other Cabinet officers, agency heads, or other senior US officials may be invited to attend meetings of the NSC or its subgroups depending on the issues being considered. The Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs is the chief supervisory officer of the NSC system and the NSC staff. Secretary Kissinger attends the Council meetings as Assistant to the President, so the State Department is represented at NSC meetings by the Deputy Secretary. The Council does not have regularly scheduled meetings.

2. Principal Subgroups of the NSC

The NSC subgroups are divided into three general categories:

a. Interdepartmental Groups

The foundation of the NSC system is a series of Interdepartmental Groups (IGs) at the Assistant Secretary level. There are six of these groups—

Africa, Latin America, East Asia, Near and Middle East, Europe, Politico-Military--each chaired by the appropriate Assistant Secretary of State and comprising representatives of the Defense Department, JCS, CIA, USIA, AID, NSC staff and other agencies such as Treasury, Commerce, OMB, etc., depending on the issue to be considered. These groups draft the basic papers, usually in response to National Security Study Memoranda (NSSMs), which form the basis of NSC consideration of an issue.

b. Review Groups

There are four groups in this category, each chaired by the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, and with representation at the Deputy or Under Secretary level, although the Chairman, JCS, and the DCI are also members. These groups review the work of the IGs, refining issues and options in preparation for submission to the President and discussion of the issue in a full NSC meeting. They are:

- Senior Review Group (SRG). The workhorse of the system at the Deputy Secretary level. Concerned primarily with policy oriented issues.
- Verification Panel (VP). Concerned primarily with technical analysis to help develop choices in such matters as strategic arms limitation, mutual and balanced force reductions in Europe, and other major arms control subjects. As its name implies, the VP places great emphasis on the verifiability of compliance with the terms of any agreement in this area.
- Defense Program Review Committee (DPRC). Deals with major issues of defense policy, posture and budgetary support. Integrates consideration of strategic international political and economic implications of defense programs and relates these programs and resource requirements to overall national priorities and the Federal budget.
- Intelligence Committee (IC). Provides guidance to the intelligence community on intelligence needs of top policymakers, and evaluates intelligence products.

c. Operational Groups

There are two groups in this category: In contrast to the review groups described above, which operate as an issue is being developed for consideration by the President, these two groups operate within the general framework of already determined policy.

- Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG). A high-level task force, responsible for ensuring coordination of all elements of USG activ-

ity--political, military, economic--in crisis situations. Serves as a management team assuring flexible and timely action by the various departments in the context of Presidential decisions in a fast-developing situation. This group is chaired by the Assistant to the President and includes representatives at the Deputy Secretary level, the Chairman, JCS and the DCI.

-Under Secretaries Committee (USC). The body which ensures effective and uniform execution of the President's foreign policy decisions. Develops operational plans and recommendations, usually in response to National Security Decision Memoranda (NSDMs), to implement policy decisions. Also undertakes studies on a variety of subjects which, because of their nature, require initial attention at a level higher than that of the Interdepartmental Groups. This group is chaired by the Deputy Secretary of State, with representation at the Deputy or Under Secretary level.

3. Lists of Members of NSC Groups

a. National Security Council

The President, Chairman
The Vice President
Secretary of State
Secretary of Defense
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff--Military Advisor
Director of Central Intelligence--Intelligence Advisor
Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs--
Chief Supervisory Officer of the NSC System

b. NSC Subgroups

1) Senior Review Group

Assistant to the President, Chairman
Deputy Secretary of State
Deputy Secretary of Defense
Deputy Secretary of the Treasury
Director, Central Intelligence
Chairman, JCS

2) Defense Program Review Committee

Assistant to the President, Chairman
Deputy Secretary of State
Deputy Secretary of Defense
Director, Central Intelligence
Chairman, JCS
Director, OMB
Chairman, CEA

3) Verification Panel

Assistant to the President, Chairman
Deputy Secretary of State
Deputy Secretary of Defense
Director, Central Intelligence
Chairman, JCS
Director, ACDA

4) Intelligence Committee

Assistant to the President, Chairman
Deputy Secretary of State
Deputy Secretary of Defense
Under Secretary of the Treasury
Director, Central Intelligence
Chairman, JCS

5) Washington Special Actions Group

Assistant to the President, Chairman
Deputy Secretary of State
Deputy Secretary of Defense
Director, Central Intelligence
Chairman, JCS

6) Under Secretaries Committee

Deputy Secretary of State, Chairman
Deputy Secretary of Defense
Director, Central Intelligence
Chairman, JCS
Assistant to the President

C. HOW THE NSC SYSTEM WORKS

1. The NSSM

Once it is determined that an issue involving interdepartmental considerations requires analysis and Presidential decision, the NSC staff prepares a National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) calling for a study of the issue, frequently assigning preparation of the study to one of the Interdepartmental Groups, setting a due date, and indicating which of the NSC principal groups will review the issue. Occasionally, if the issue is a highly technical one or does not appropriately fall within the purview of one of the IGs, an ad hoc group is created to prepare the study.

The Interdepartmental Group or ad hoc group drafts the basic paper, defining the issues requiring Presidential decision, setting forth US objectives and outlining the viable alternative courses of action which the US might pursue to achieve these objectives. For each alternative, the paper indicates the advantages and disadvantages of that option; the cost, if budgetary considerations are involved; and some of the likely operational consequences that might flow from a decision to pursue that course of action.

3. Review of the NSSM Response

The Senior Review Group then meets to consider the paper. This review may result in a refinement of the issues, the recasting or development of additional courses of action, a request for additional information, or occasionally, agreement among the agencies on a course of action to recommend to the President. If such a consensus develops at the Deputy Secretary level, a paper will be prepared for the President, outlining the issue and the alternative courses of action, and conveying the agreed recommendation. If, as is more likely, there are differences of opinion among the departments as to the preferred course of action, the matter may be referred to the National Security Council.

Prior to the NSC meeting, the NSC staff prepares a briefing book for the President containing the basic paper and each agency's recommendations. At the NSC meeting, with the President in the chair, the Assistant to the President outlines the issue and the alternative courses of action, and the President requests comments and recommendations from each NSC member. In addition to arguing for his own favored course of action, each NSC member has the opportunity to rebut the arguments of other members with which he does not agree.

4. The NSDM

Following the NSC meeting, often with further consideration of the written material, the President will make his decision among the courses of action recommended by the various agencies. At this time, the NSC staff prepares a National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) conveying as precisely as possible the President's decision and tasking the Under Secretaries Committee or the departments with development and implementation of operational plans to carry out the decision.

D. PREPARING RESPONSES TO NSSMs

The Executive Secretary (S/S) receives the NSSM from the NSC staff and, after consultation with S/P, assigns action to an Assistant Secretary. Often the

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NSSM itself specifies the IG; sometimes it does not. Ad hoc studies, short of full NSSMs, are usually handled the same way as NSSM responses. On occasion, S/P chairs a study, particularly when several bureaus in the Department are involved.

1. The IG and Working Groups

The designated Assistant Secretary has primary responsibility for setting up of the IG working group and the calling of meetings of the IG to review drafts. The Executive Secretariat plays no role in this process since the Assistant Secretary is functioning in his capacity as Chairman of an NSC Interdepartmental Group.

2. The NSSM Response

The actual drafting of the NSSM response is generally done by the IG working group and reviewed by the IG. The document is prepared as a memorandum from the Assistant Secretary to the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. (See IV. MEMORANDA FOR THE WHITE HOUSE.)

- This memorandum is not normally reviewed by a seventh floor Principal and is not staffed by the Executive Secretariat.
- The NSSM response is, however, sent to the NSC via S/S-I, Rm. 7241, for logging, distribution in the Department, and transmittal to the White House. The action bureau must deliver the original plus 41 copies to S/S-I (30 if NODIS). The NSC wants 25 copies; the rest are for internal Department distribution.

3. Commenting on NSSM Responses

When the NSC receives the NSSM response the NSC circulates it to all involved government agencies for agency positions on the options presented. The Department receives its copy for comment. At this point the action Assistant Secretary must make certain that the appropriate seventh floor Principal (not including the Secretary) reviews the Department's proposed position or comments, which are normally submitted to the White House under a Springsteen-Scowcroft memorandum (cleared by the appropriate seventh floor Principal). On occasion of interdepartmental dispute, however, the Deputy Secretary or Under Secretary for Political Affairs could send comments to the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs.

It is essential that all persons involved in NSSMs realize that Secretary Kissinger will not address policy matters under his Secretary of State hat which he will have to consider in his role as Assistant to the President for National Security Matters.

1. The USC Role

The NSC Under Secretaries Committee (USC), one of the six main subgroups of the National Security Council, is chaired by the Deputy Secretary of State. Its membership is at a subcabinet level more senior than the IGs. The Under Secretaries Committee:

- prepares studies which result in options and recommendations which are submitted to the President by the Chairman.
- monitors and coordinates certain ongoing negotiations and programs, and the implementation of certain foreign policy decisions.

The USC undertakes preparation of studies or monitoring and coordination on a wide variety of subjects in response to requests from the President, conveyed in directions issued by the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. The Chairman of the USC has also taken the initiative in calling for the preparation of some studies. Members of the USC also, on occasion, request that the Committee undertake consideration of an issue.

Studies prepared by the USC are cleared at the Deputy or Under Secretary level and frequently include specific recommendations and statements of agency views. The completed reports are sent from the Chairman of the USC to the President.

2. USC Membership and Staff

The membership of the Under Secretaries Committee includes:

- the Deputy Secretary of State (Chairman);
- the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs;
- the Deputy Secretary of Defense;
- the Director of Central Intelligence;
- the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Other agencies are added on an ad hoc basis, depending on the issue under consideration.

The Staff Director of the NSC Under Secretaries Committee reports to the Deputy Secretary of State as Chairman, and is also a member of the Policy Planning Staff (S/P). He is responsible for both the administrative and substantive coordination of all business before the Under Secretaries Committee.

Responsibility for preparation of Under Secretaries Committee reports is normally assigned to an appropriate bureau in the Department of State. The bureau, in turn, establishes an interagency working group.

3. The USC and the State Department

The Under Secretaries Committee is an arm of the National Security Council and is not a committee of the Department of State. Therefore, although the Executive Secretariat works in close coordination with the Chairman of the USC and with the USC staff director, S/S does not task, staff, log, or move USC papers except at the initial and final stages. The USC maintains its own document control system within the Department of State.

The Executive Secretariat:

- issues to the USC staff director under an S/S White House document chit all action memoranda for the USC. This document is logged in S/S-1 but circulated by the USC.
- logs out of the Department memoranda to the President from the USC Chairman.